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The Editor
The New York Times Book Review
224 West 43rd Street

Dear Editor:

I have just finished reading James Burnham's "Containment or Liberation", and in comparing my own impression of the book with the review which you published on it, on March 1, under the signature of Joseph Harsch, can only conclude that your reviewer was utterly unfair.

It so happens that I come from Eastern Europe. I also happen to be a life-long student of international affairs, particularly well acquainted with Eastern European affairs and familiar with all that was written in the post-war years in this country on the subject of U. S. foreign policy. I am, therefore, more than just casually interested in the vastly important matters with which the Burnham book is concerned.

Judging Mr. Harsch's review with this background, I can not refrain myself from calling it a "cagey" attempt to kill one of the few truly important books that were published in recent years on U. S. foreign policy.

Instead of acquainting the readers with Mr. Burnham's ideas and taking issue with them, Mr. Harsch simply dismisses the whole book, by saying that since, with the advent of the new administration, containment versus liberation ceased to be an issue, any discussion of the political premises of a policy of liberation comes down to flogging a dead horse. Mr. Harsch, whose record on the Soviet menace and how to deal with it, is, to say the least, inconsistent, admits that Mr. Burnham would have written a timely book only if he had answered in great detail the question of how to carry out in practice a policy of liberation. And in support of his argument that Mr. Burnham has failed to do so, he comes forward with the completely untrue statement that only four pages out of 254 are devoted to answering this question.

The truth of the matter, as everybody claiming to be a foreign policy expert should know, is that the policy of liberation has hardly been enunciated by the seven weeks old administration. It has not yet been officially defined in practical terms and has only been discussed in a most cursory way by the press and other publications. Therefore, any unbiased critic, I would say any critic of good faith, whether he agrees or not with all or any of the views presented by Mr. Burnham, should welcome the first book that intelligently brings into the public discussion the possible content and the probable implications of a policy that was publicly proclaimed by the U. S. Government. A critic of good policy would certainly not brush aside such a book, well knowing that in doing so he would discourage the bookshops from ordering it and thus prevent it from reaching the attention of the public. This amounts, in my view, to an indirect form of censorship, to a deliberate attempt of preventing certain views from getting into the wide stream of ideas on which an enlightened public opinion must feed in order to make intelligent political decisions.

As a responsible writer, Mr. Burnham is not out to offer to the Soviets a blueprint of the concrete actions which this country could undertake in implementing a policy of liberation. He restricts himself to several illustrations of such type of action, carefully noting that the means must be empirically developed. It would, indeed, be the height of irresponsibility for anyone to spell out in detail the possible courses of action, since they may well be precisely the ones that would ultimately be adopted by the government. And they can be only actions of the type which should never be publicized but carried out with utmost discretion.

The fact that you have selected Mr. Harsch for the job of reviewing a Burnham book speaks for itself. In recent years Mr. Harsch was consistently wrong both in his judgement of Soviet policy and in his advocacy of policies designed to counter it effectively. He is of the wishy-washy-do-nothing-leave-everything-in-the-care-of-history school of thought, which long ago has resigned itself to the idea that the initiative should be left forever in the hands of the Soviet dictators. (Needless to say that this can be easily substantiated with "verse and chapter.")

Unfortunately, the Harsch review is but the latest example of your policy of discrimination against any and all uncompromising (i.e., in the present world conditions, realistic and truthful) works on Communism and the Soviet Union. It would seem that you have learned nothing from the history of these last years. You still seem to stick to the attitude which not so long ago prompted you to give to the self-apologia of Owen Lattimore (the most successful Communist operator in the realms of "influencing people"), a first page display. Such an attitude, I regret to say, is bound to raise serious doubts in the minds of your readers with regard to your true political beliefs, or, at least, to the soundness of your political judgment. And, in the long run, it would ruin your standing with the reading public on which you strive. As one of your regular readers, I can only hope that the most respectable men in charge of that great institution The New York Times, of which I am a sincere admirer, would come around to take a close look at your activities.

Sincerely yours,

(s) Brutus Costa

New York, March 15, 1953

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